

Mr. Speaker, you are the Speaker of this House. This House has both Democrats and Republicans, and you need to lead us. It's that time. I will make a quick suggestion. Here is what you can do in three easy steps:

Step No. 1, open the government;

Step No. 2, let us pay our bills; and

Step No. 3, let's negotiate. Let's come together as Democrats and Republicans and negotiate a real budget that starts to address our debt. Let's make sure we don't leave our children and grandchildren a mountain of debt. Let's do what our parents and grandparents always did, which was to leave the country better off for the next generation.

That is what it takes—leadership. Mr. Speaker, now is the time for that leadership. You are the Speaker of this House, and we need you to lead us as Democrats and Republicans. America is watching, and we need to put the people's interests first.

THE DEBT CRISIS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. MCCLINTOCK) for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Mr. Speaker, the debt limit exists for a simple reason: to assure that public debt isn't recklessly piled up without Congress periodically acknowledging it and addressing the spending patterns that are causing it. If a debt limit increase is supposed to be automatic, as the President suggests, then there is really no purpose to it.

A new dimension has now appeared in this discussion. Unlike every one of his predecessors, this President has vowed that unless Congress unconditionally raises the debt limit, the United States will default on its sovereign debt.

But a failure to raise the debt limit would not, by itself, cause the Nation to default. The Government Accountability Office has consistently held that the Treasury Secretary has "the authority to choose the order in which to pay obligations of the United States" to protect the Nation's credit. Such authority is inherent in the 1789 act that established the Treasury Department and entrusted it with "the management of the revenue" and the "support of the public credit." The affirmative duty of the Treasury Department to do so is underscored by the 14th Amendment.

Our revenues are more than 10 times our debt payments, so paying the debt first to prevent a sovereign default is well within the financial ability of the Federal Government—and indeed, it is a fiscal imperative.

Now, earlier this year, the House passed H.R. 807, which not only explicitly requires the payment of the national debt in the case of an impasse over the debt limit, but even allows the President to exceed the debt limit, itself, in order to protect the Nation's credit. That measure languishes in the

Senate under the threat of a Presidential veto.

Protecting the sovereign credit by prioritizing payments would mean delaying paying other bills. That is also untenable, unthinkable, and something much to be avoided, but it would not imperil the Nation's sovereign credit. Only the President can do that.

The House leadership met with the President last week and offered to extend the debt limit until November 22 with no strings attached. The President refused. Senate Republicans offered a 6-month extension, but the Senate Democratic leader refused.

What the President threatens to do would be catastrophic and unprecedented. The full faith and credit of the United States is what gives markets the confidence to loan money to the Federal Government. Even a threat of default—exactly the kind the President is now making—could have dire consequences to a Nation that now owes more than its entire economy produces in a year.

So where do we go from here?

Republicans have miscalculated on two key assumptions: first, that the Democrats would negotiate the issues that divide our country—they have not; and second, that Democrats would seek to minimize the suffering caused by the impasse—they have not.

Given the ruthless and vindictive way the shutdown has been handled, I now believe that this President would willfully act to destroy the full faith and credit of the United States unless the Congress acquiesces to all of his demands—at least as long as he sees political advantage in doing so.

If the Republicans acquiesce, the immediate crisis will quickly vanish, credit markets will calm, and public life will return to other matters. But a fundamental element of our Constitution will have been destroyed: the power of the purse will have shifted from the representatives of the people to the Executive. The executive bureaucracies will be freed to churn out ever more outlandish regulations with no effective congressional review or check through the purse. A perilous era will have begun in which the President sets spending levels and vetoes any bill falling short of his demands. Whenever a deadline approaches, one House can simply refuse to negotiate with the other until Congress is faced with a Hobson's choice of a shutdown or a default. The Nation's spending will again dangerously accelerate, the deficit will rapidly widen, and the economic prosperity of the Nation will continue to slowly bleed away.

This impasse may have started as a dispute over a collapsing health program, but it has now taken on the dimensions of a constitutional crisis. Yesterday, in Washington, a group of America's veterans rose up to take a stand against these unconstitutional usurpations. I believe the salvation of our Nation now ultimately depends on the American people joining them.

HONORING 12 MEMBERS OF THE 1ST SQUAD, 2ND PLATOON, HOTEL COMPANY OF THE 26TH MARINE REGIMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. VELA) for 5 minutes.

Mr. VELA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor 12 members of the 1st Squad, 2nd Platoon, Hotel Company of the 26th Marine Regiment. These brave men made an important contribution to the war effort in Vietnam, but their efforts could not be honored at the time without exposing ongoing intelligence operations. Like so many of our Nation's heroes, they have not received the recognition they deserve, and I am here today to share with my colleagues in Congress and our entire Nation the details of an incident that helped change the way the Vietnam war was fought.

On May 29, 1967, at the end of Operation Hickory and the beginning of Operation Prairie IV, the 1st Squad, under Sergeant Thomas Gonzalez, was on a reconnaissance patrol when they recovered a spent Russian SA-2 surface-to-air missile inside the demilitarized zone which divided North and South Vietnam. While Russian involvement in the Vietnam war was widely suspected, discovery of the SA-2 was a major find, and the command and control mechanism of the missile was transported to Washington, D.C., for analysis.

Due to the ongoing cold war and heightened political sensitivities regarding Russian involvement in the war, public disclosure of the incident was withheld.

While the unit was never fully recognized for its accomplishment, the intelligence it collected had a direct impact on combat. Prior to discovery of the missile, U.S. aviators flying B-52 bombers to attack Vietnam struggled as enemy forces became more proficient at targeting and shooting American aircraft. This forced Americans to limit their missions to areas further south; and, as the North Vietnamese Army continued to move their surface-to-air missile launch sites south into the DMZ, B-52 aircraft were forced to fly even further south, limiting the effectiveness of their missions to provide support to troops engaged in ground combat.

As a result of the recovery of the SA-2 missile, B-52 bomber crews had a better understanding of the threat, and they used the intelligence collected by the 1st Squad to alter their tactics. Changing the strategy of the B-52 bomb strikes allowed the aircraft to provide better combat support to marines and other ground troops and ultimately saved countless lives.

Forty-six years later, it is time for our Nation to recognize these American heroes. Today, let us honor these men: Sergeant Thomas Gonzalez, Corporal Gerald D. Eggers, Private First Class Ronald W. Blaine, Private First Class Charles L. Melton, Private First